and heard it fill up behind me. I heard people at the bar whisper, "That's Dick Contino."

I kept my snout in my glass. The booze sparked political conversions and apostasies. I moved left and denounced Joe McCarthy. I moved right and shot Alger Hiss 2,000 volts. I freed the Scottsboro Boys and beat Helen Gahagan Douglas to death with my accordion.

The booze enlightened. The booze obfuscated. I figured I'd see Viv and respond to stimuli like Pavlov's fucking dog.

I heard a familiar voice. I recognized it. I glanced two stools down.

Gene Biscailuz plucked the fruit off an old-fashioned. L. Trent Woodard sucked a cherry out of his Manhattan.

I saw Woodard. He didn't see me. I eavesdropped.

Biscailuz made small talk. Polio and Sister Kenny—blah, blah, blaah. Woodard said, "Sheriff, let's talk turkey. You can't let Bill Parker and the city cops bootjack all that money. You can't—"

Woodard saw me. He dropped the Sheriff in midspiel and slid two stools down. I slid to the far right and got right up in his face.

"Back off, baby doll. I'm a pistol-packing white man, and I don't like your leanings. And don't blast the LAPD and invoke me in the same breath. Those guys are the thin blue line between freedom and the fifth column."

Woodard dropped his glass. A priest spun off his stool and spilled scotch in my lap. I shouted my declaration. My chest mike must have caught every word.

I locked orbs with Woodard. An eyeball duel ensued. I broke it off and barged into the crowd. A little bit of my soul broke loose and bopped off unbidden.

People watched me pass. I heard a dozen "Dick Continos." Tuxedos and taffeta swirled around me. I caught a split-second blip of Chief William H. Parker in dress blues.

I walked out to a palm-lined portico. It was private and peaceful. I figured she'd find me and pounce.

I leaned on a railing and watched cars bomb down Wilshire. I counted up from zero. She pounced at twenty-two.

"I thought you'd at least send me an autographed picture."

I pulled a perfect pivot and spun around close enough to kiss her. I said, "I knew you'd be here."

She smiled. She smelled like Tweed or Jungle Gardenia. She was 49 or 50 and looked it. She wore a tight black gown. Her right breast was half again as large as her left. Her cleavage dipped proportionately. Her right nipple was half-exposed. It was dark and pebbled up from cold air or excitement.

I wanted to fuck her. My heart lurched to the left.

"How did you know I'd be here?"

Freddy O briefed me. He said to cite Harrison Carroll's column.

I stepped closer. Viv reached up and tossed her hair off her right shoulder. I saw a razor nick under her arm.

I said, "I read about the Sister Kenny thing, and I saw your name mentioned."

Viv stepped back. Her heels snagged on her floor-length hemline. She tottered and caught herself. My heart lurched. I wanted her to reach for me.

I looked over her shoulder. Her husband slid through the ballroom. He had one arm around a young man.

Viv said, "Can I tell you why I came on so strong?"

I nodded. I jammed my hands in my pockets. I didn't want to touch her too soon.

She said, "To begin with, I acknowledged our age difference and decided to risk the chance that you'd find me elderly, then I thought you might be lonely and vulnerable after all that time in prison and Korea, then I thought I owed you something for the injudicious way my husband has expressed his admiration for you, then I thought that anyone who's been as candid about their fear as you've been would appreciate my candor and not judge me as desperate, and then I figured I'd better act fast before I hit menopause and get indifferent to sex."

My heartbeat escalated. My chest expanded. A strip of Harvey Glatman's tape popped loose.

Viv said, "Say something. I had that speech

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.

Intil I find a
'eal man,
ll settle for a real smoke."

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prepared, and you're just looking at me."

I said, "Your husband's in the next room."

She said, "He's a homosexual, and he wants me to be with you."

I said, "What?"

She said, "You're an artist, so don't pretend you don't understand."

I backed into the railing. L. Trent Woodard walked by the doorway and winked at me. His young man blew me a kiss.

I said, "Jesus fucking Christ."

Viv said, "Be less vulgar, and follow me home. I'll be in the Packard Caribbean."

Viv led the way. I followed. The nut-ward guy and the goon tailed me.

We caravanned to 3rd and Muirfield. The nut-ward guy and the goon goosed my tailpipes. Viv stopped in front of her house. She pointed me into the driveway and pulled up behind me.

She boxed my dad's car in. She didn't want me to rabbit.

The pad backed up to the Wilshire Country Club. Viv walked in ahead of me and turned on some lights. The nut-ward guy and the goon disappeared down the block.

The house was big and salmon pink Spanish. I walked up and peeped the peephole. Smoked glass smeared my view. My martini-mottled mind went wild.

I saw a Commie commissar corps. I saw my mom strapped to a rack. Trent Woodard brandished a branding tool. Dig that hot hammer and sickle.

I blinked. I saw a dozen old were dowager demons and se: cubi. They craved my seed. They bared their geriatric genitalia.

Viv was their siren and shill. Trent couldn't get hard and hose women. They needed ME.

I blinked. A car pulled up to the curb. Somebody whispered, "Ring the bell, shithead."

I yipped and cringed. I turned around. I saw the nut-ward guy and the goon in the goonmobile.

I rang the bell. Viv opened the door. My peephole panorama went poof!

I stepped inside. Viv handed me a martini. I sniffed it for Spanish fly or knockout drops.

Viv shut the door. My drink looked kosher. I chugalugged it and ate the olive.

The living room was king-sized and leftist primitive chic.

Labor posters. Furniture fabrics finished in gold filigree. Atavistic statues with fat phalluses and pointy pudenda.

Viv tracked my eyes. "I'm eclectic. And the fertility gods are special to me."

I said, "You married a fag, so I guess you needed all the help you could get."

Viv walked to a sideboard and mixed herself a martini. My martini sent me mixed messages:

Fuck her/Don't fuck her/Fuck her rich Red pawn of a husband. Fuck the LAPD for the way they fucked you/Fuck everyone and fuck no one at all.

ite my

heriff

Biscailuz.

Viv dropped an olive in her drink. "Gene's a friend, yes. He kept Trent out of the papers when he—"

"Got picked up during a fruit roust at some joint in West Hollywood?"

Viv smiled. "You're correct. He saved Trent from a great deal of embarrassment and turned him into quite a resource."

"What do you mean?"

"That Trent's a good lawyer, and Gene Biscailuz isn't so blinded by a hatred of homosexuals that he can't utilize his talent."

I said, "Too bad the LAPD doesn't feel that way."

Viv sipped her drink. "Yes and no. For one, Trent hates them too much to work with them. Gene hates them, too, and Trent's been working with him on this budget contretemps that the Sheriff's and the LAPD are embroiled in."

"On the Q.T., you mean."

"That's correct. Gene doesn't want it known that Trent's working with him, and Trent doesn't ever want the LAPD to learn that he's quite fond of young men. He's quite sure that the LAPD is out to compromise him any way they can, so of course he's remained quite discreet."

I looked around the room. The labor posters were laid out in gold-lacquered frames.

"Is Trent an actual Communist?"

Viv laughed. "Nobody with brains and a soul is a *real* Communist."

"What about Commie front groups?"

"For instance?"

I pulled names off Freddy O's crib sheet. "The People's Committee for a Free Philippines, the Free-the-Rosenbergs Defense Fund, the National Alliance for Social Justice, the—"

Viv cut me off. "It sounds like you have those names memorized."

I shuddered. My chest mike shifted and settled off to the left.

Viv said, "Fixate on me. Don't fixate on my husband."

I got pissed. I got wild-hair-up-the-ass pissed.

"I can't get work because of your husband. He's run a big, goddamn guilt-by-association number on me."

Viv shrugged. "Then work for social justice. Teach underprivileged Negro children to play the accordion, and I'll pay you what Las Vegas entertainers earn."

Don't blow your cool/Don't blast your cork/Don't—

"Really, Dick, you must overlook the few injudicious comments my husband has made about you. Look to the real historical source of your troubles and try to understand the big picture."

I tamped my temper down. "For instance?"

"For instance, my husband is involved in big issues."

Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/qyln0004